

## Website Content Good Practice Template

### AREA TITLE:

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#### Local Authority Policy

#### About...

#### Introduction

The Government wants disabled children to be a priority, both nationally and locally. Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC), launched in May 2007, is the transformation programme for disabled children's services. Supported by substantial new funding and measures designed to make the system work better, the AHDC programme aims to deliver:

- Access and empowerment for disabled children and families: setting a clear standard of service provision for disabled children and their families from public services
- Responsive services and timely support: Providing co-ordinated, timely, integrated service provision to disabled children and their families.
- Improved service quality and capacity: increasing the provision and quality of key services for disabled children and their families, including short breaks and childcare provision.

Statutory duties in the Children Act 2004 require every local authority to work with partners, through Children's Trusts, to devise and implement strategies to improve outcomes for children aged 0-19 years.

Every Child Matters is a set of reforms supported by the Children Act 2004. Its aim is for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. Aiming High details the Government's commitment to disabled children as part of these reforms.

In December 2007 the Government also published the Children's Plan which set out some ambitious goals to improve the lives of families, children and young people by 2020. Local Authorities are seen as key agents in delivering these reforms.

On special educational needs (SEN) and disability, The Children's Plan announced a renewed focus on raising expectations of what children with SEN should achieve – across the five Every Child Matter outcomes. It announced a package of measures, costing £18m, to:

- Improve the skills of the workforce in meeting the needs of children with SEN;
- Enhance the role for school SEN co-ordinators;
- Improve data to identify whether SEN pupils are making good progress.

For disabled children and their families an additional £90m was announced,

to improve equipment, facilities and buildings for short break services. Ofsted were asked to lead a full review into the quality of special education needs provision, to start in 2009.

### **Joint Planning and Commissioning**

The Government aims to ensure that Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) work in effective partnerships and pool budgets to commission services for children and young people for which they are jointly responsible. Because funding is channelled through local authorities, it makes sense to take a strategic role in making the structural and process changes needed to establish a mixed market of provision. Many of the services needed are provided by other parts of the system so it is essential that authorities work jointly with PCTs and other partners to commission services.

### **Childcare Strategy**

The Government's Ten Year Strategy for Childcare set out four key themes:

- Choice and flexibility - parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life
- Availability - for all families with children aged up to 14 who need it
- Quality - high-quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early years workforce
- Affordability - families to be able to afford flexible, high-quality childcare that is appropriate for their needs.

In order to support local authorities on the delivery of the Ten Year Strategy, the DCSF, in partnership with the Local Government Association, set up the [Childcare Implementation Project](#).

### **Children's Centres**

Children's centres are multi-purpose centres where children under five years old and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information. By 2010, every community should be served by a Sure Start Children's Centre, offering permanent universal provision across the country, ensuring that every child gets the best start in life.

Local authorities have been given strategic responsibility for the delivery of children's centres planning the location and development of centres to meet the needs of local communities, in consultation with parents, the private, voluntary and independent sectors, PCTs, Jobcentre Plus and other key partners to deliver a range of services which include information and advice, child care, health services, family support, parental outreach, and employment advice for disadvantaged families.

### **Extended Schools**

The Government believes that schools, located at the heart of the community, are well placed to take up the challenge of helping to reform services for children, young people and communities under the Every Child Matters agenda. The publication *Extended Schools: Building on*

*Experience* sets out a core offer of services that all children should be able to access through schools by 2010.

The core offer includes:

- A varied range of activities including study support, sport and music clubs, combined with childcare in primary schools
- Parenting and family support including 'wraparound' childcare from 8am to 6pm,
- Swift and easy access to targeted and specialist services
- Community access to facilities including adult and family learning, ICT and sports grounds

Policy guidance for both Children's Centres and Extended School services explicitly states that consideration should be given to ensuring access to those children - including disabled children - whose take-up of services has previously been low.

### Education

Educational provision funded by authorities for pupils on the autism spectrum includes:

- Mainstream schools with or without additional support
- Generic special schools or units for pupils with learning disabilities with or without additional support or outreach support
- Schools, units and classes which are specific to the autism spectrum
- Schools or units for pupils with other types of SEN (e.g. emotional and behavioural difficulties; language disorders; sensory or physical difficulties)
- Home-based programmes
- Advisory/outreach teams for pupils on the autism spectrum
- Special individualised programmes for children who do not attend school

The vast majority of children on the autism spectrum attend schools and units within their home authority, but some attend provision in an adjoining authority and a few attend schools in a different part of the country, many miles from home. Most of these schools are run by local authorities, but some have been set up by independent organisations.

The diversity of type or provision both within and across authorities has strengths and weaknesses. There is strength as different models and interventions allow variations in provision to be explored and evaluated, and assumptions about what is possible can be challenged. A disadvantage is that such variation can lead to confusion, and sometimes distress, for parents who are not able to access services they would like in their area.

Professionals too might experience problems in understanding the policy and practice when changing areas. Given this diversity, it is important that a local authority provide clear guidelines on its policy and practice in relation to those on the autism spectrum and has the flexibility and

willingness to listen to proposals from parents and professionals. Groups of professionals meet in some local authorities to audit the needs of children on the autism spectrum and to plan ahead to meet these appropriately.

- The local authority's SEN policy should refer to the needs of children on the autism spectrum ideally there should be there a separate policy document on autism, which is widely disseminated, and involves all interested parties
- There should be a clear multi-agency mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the policy and reviewing and revising it, that involves all interested parties.
- There should be clear links with key strategic policies and plans within the authority consistent with the overarching principles of Children's Services and Planning and consistency with Early Years and Childcare Development Plan, the Education Development Plan and any SEN Development Plan or Inclusion Plan
- The policy should be drawn up in the light of current and potential demand therefore regular data should be collected on the numbers of children on the autism spectrum and estimates of future demand are made on the basis of accepted prevalence rates. Data should be analysed for trends in, for example, the age at identification, gender balance, types of sub-group, and the information used to inform policy. Data should be shared with regional partners and used to promote co-ordinated regional practice.
- Local authorities should co-ordinate plans across the region and involve independent and voluntary providers so that children and parents have access to a range of provision which an individual LEA might not be able to provide.

### Health & Social Care

The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (Children's NSF) is a 10 year programme intended to stimulate long-term and sustained improvement in children's health. It aims to ensure fair, high quality and integrated health and social care from pregnancy, right through to adulthood. At the heart of the Children's NSF is a fundamental change in thinking about health and social care services. It is intended to lead to a cultural shift, resulting in services which are designed and delivered around the needs of children and families using those services, not around the needs of organisations. The Children's NSF is aimed at everyone who comes into contact with, or delivers services to children and young people.

The NSF for Children includes an autism exemplar for professionals from a broad range of backgrounds including education, health, social services and the voluntary sector (although they could also be of interest

to parents and older children). The exemplar helps to:

- Stimulate local debate and assist multi-agency partners to re-evaluate the way they collaborate on, commission and deliver children's services, for this and other conditions, to the benefit children and their families;
- Provide an aid to examining and improving local clinical & non-clinical governance;
- Provide a multi-disciplinary training tool for staff working with children and young people to raise awareness of specific issues and stimulate discussion;
- Canvass the views of children and families on specific children's issues (e.g. via focus groups), provide a non-threatening mechanism to open discussion, such as good and 'not so good' aspects of the current service, and
- Provide a starting point or template for debate, prior to development of new local strategies for managing complex childhood conditions.

However, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Autism conducted research in 2007 which found that there is a long way to go before the exemplar is fully implemented. For example at present almost half (44%) of officials and 70% of councillors who responded to the research were not aware of the autism exemplar chapter of the NSF; given this it is unsurprising that only 35% of officials and 10% of councillors said their authority uses the autism exemplar chapter of the NSF.

Local authorities are expected to implement the whole of the Children's NSF by 2014.

### **Providing Information**

The Autism Education Trust undertook research in 2008. It found that many local authority websites are still failing to meet their duties regarding provision of information about SEN policies and provision. Many local authorities provide "information portals" that signpost people affected by other conditions and their carers to all of the information they may need. This should also be done regarding the autism spectrum.

Local authorities should aim to include more information specific to the autism spectrum on their websites. In keeping with the Every Child Matters agenda and DCSF's e-Strategy for learning and children's services (2005), information about provision and support should be shared across services for children. Accordingly, online information is needed that informs professionals in social care, health, and the voluntary sector, as well as parents.

### **Involving People**

The Government has developed Health and Social Care Local Involvement Networks ([LINKs](#)) across the country made up of individuals

and community groups who work together to improve local services. Local authorities should encourage families affected by autism to become involved in the local LINK.

### **An Autism-Friendly Local Authority**

Forward planning at all levels is vital when working with children on the autism spectrum. At a local authority regional and strategic level there should be close liaison with health and social services in order to build up a clear picture of the size and make up of the cohort of children on the autism spectrum in a local authority or region and a clear inter-agency policy on provision for children on the autism spectrum. Forward thinking should include planning to meet expected future demand on services and support networks, and aim for a spectrum of provision for the spectrum of need.

The Autism Good Practice Guidance was developed by the (then) DfES, the Department of Health and the Autism Working Group and includes representation from voluntary and community parent support organisations, practitioners, government agencies, local education authorities and researchers. It brings together comprehensive guidelines based on the expertise of practitioners and the Autism Working Group. *Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Good Practice Guidance* aims to raise awareness and standards of support for children on the autism spectrum.

It has the following recommendations for an autism-friendly local authority:

- Take account of the perspective of those on the autism spectrum when developing services and designing provision to meet their needs
- Provide or arrange access to a range of provision (from early years to post-16) for children on the autism spectrum which ensures a co-ordinated and coherent service to the children and their families
- Collect and collate information on numbers of children on the autism spectrum to assist in forward planning
- Have a policy on provision for children on the autism spectrum that includes:
  - provision of home-based programmes
  - use of ICT with children on the autism spectrum
  - inclusion of children on the autism spectrum
  - auditing and monitoring the effectiveness of provision
  - training and the need to extend expertise in autism at different skill levels
- Make sure that parents and professionals are aware of the different approaches used in teaching children on the autism

spectrum, including approaches used in the home

- Provide training so that there are staff with specialist knowledge of autism who can support schools in their work with children on the autism spectrum and their families
- Commission and fund courses in autism that are available to all staff (teaching and non-teaching) and families of children on the autism spectrum
- Encourage the development of early identification of children on the autism spectrum by participating in multi-agency assessments and working parties to develop identification protocols
- Ensure that placement decisions for children on the autism spectrum take into account their specific needs within the triad of impairments
- Help to provide ways of supporting families outside of school hours
- Liaise effectively between agencies, promoting partnerships between Health, Social Services, LEAs, the voluntary sector and parents
- Ensure, where necessary, that educational settings have access to the skills of speech and language therapists who have specialist knowledge of autism or guidance from a therapist or other professional specialising in autism
- Have close links with the Connexions service to ensure smooth transitions to post-16 provision for young people the autism spectrum
- Work co-operatively with other LEAs in the region to enable consistent approaches to children on the autism spectrum and their families.

Get help  
from...

[Aiming High for Disabled Children \(AHDC\)](#) Information about the Government's transformation programme for disabled children's services

Department for Children, Schools and Families: [Information on Strategy and Governance](#), [Joint Planning and Commissioning](#), [Childcare Strategy](#), [Children's Plan](#) and [Extended Schools](#)

[National Service Framework for Children](#) The Children's NSF is a 10-year programme intended to stimulate long-term and sustained improvement in children's health.

[Extending inclusion](#): Access for disabled children and young people to extended schools and children's centres: a development manual  
Philippa Stobbs, Council for Disabled Children

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## Links

[Education for Children and Young People on the Autism Spectrum living in England](#): The Autism Education Trust (2008) A Review of Current Practice Issues and Challenges.

[Autism Good Practice Guidance](#): This guidance developed by the Autism Working Group gives practical advice to providers for children on the autism spectrum, based on existing good practice, and helps them to reflect on their own practice and examples of good practice. It includes a list of recommendations for local authorities to be autism friendly (see below)

[All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism: Policy into Practice](#) - report revealing an implementation gap between the policies recommended in the *National service framework for children, young people and maternity services* (the Children's NSF) and the reality of services on the ground.

## Case Studies

[Worcestershire autism policy](#) – Teachernet Autism Good Practice example

[Kent's Educational Needs strategy consultation](#) – Teachernet Autism Good Practice example

[Torbay review of special education](#) - Teachernet Autism Good Practice example

**The National Autistic Society's Accreditation scheme** evaluates services against autism specific-criteria which are applied to each area of the service being reviewed. In order to achieve accreditation, a service must provide evidence that:

- it has a specialised knowledge and understanding of autism
- the knowledge and understanding of autism consistently informs the organisation, the resources and management of the service
- the knowledge and understanding of autism consistently informs the individual assessment and support plan for all service users
- the knowledge and understanding of autism consistently informs all aspects of practice